
Buddhist Philosophy

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In this course, we will reconstruct and critically analyze some of the most important arguments in Indian Buddhist philosophy from influential philosophers ranging from the second to the eleventh centuries. We focus on works from three of the most important philosophers of Buddhist India, Nāgārjuna, Vasubandhu, and Dharmakīrti, and we will also read selections from other influential figures including Dignāga, Śāntarakṣita, Śāntideva, and Ratnakīrti. Topics will include the existence and nature of the external world, the self, and the person, as well as the problem of induction, epistemological skepticism, the impact of the Buddhist theory of selflessness on moral responsibility, the nature and source of mental content, and the problem of other minds. In addition to striving to understanding these arguments in their historical-dialectical contexts, we will also explore what we can learn from them today.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Weekly Readings and Argument Maps

I. The readings for this course are challenging, but rewarding. They are best read slowly, carefully, and more than once. Optional commentaries and recommended resources are provided for background and further reading, which may also serve as helpful sources for your midterm and final papers.

To help you digest, organize, and preserve what you've understood from the weekly readings, you will prepare a **short** reconstruction of the central argument (or one important sub-argument) from the week's assigned text. What form the argument map takes is up to you. It can be a formal reconstruction, an outline, a (hand-drawn or electronic) diagram, a flow chart, a YouTube tutorial, a mock-Wikipedia article, a PowerPoint presentation, a teaching plan, a letter to the author, or anything helps you to organize and think through the key concepts and arguments of the text.

Some questions to consider as you prepare your reconstructions: What philosophical problem/question is this argument seeking to resolve/answer? What background presuppositions does the author bring? How might the author's dialectical context figure into the argumentative structure and strategy? Which of your own presuppositions does this argument challenge, and are they justified? What clarificatory or substantive questions would you like to ask the author?

II. Submit (together with the assignment or separately) **one question**, issue, or puzzle that you hope to discuss during our class meeting.

Although these assignments will not be graded, submitting argument maps for **at least ten** of the weekly readings is required to pass the course. Submitting a discussion question every week is encouraged in order to help facilitate the best class experience. Due by 9pm the evening before the class meeting.

Midterm Paper

5-7 page paper: You will be provided with some recommended topics. Alternatively, you may write on a topic of your choosing so long as you get prior approval.

Final Paper

12-15 page paper: This paper may be either a rewrite and expansion of your Midterm Paper or a paper on a new topic of your choosing, so long as you get prior approval.

GRADES

Grades will be determined based on attendance, participation, weekly argument maps, and papers:

Attendance and Participation	15%
Weekly Argument Maps	20%
Midterm Paper	25%
Term Paper	40%

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1: Introduction to Buddhism as Philosophy

Required Reading: Amber Carpenter, *Indian Buddhist Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 2014), "Introduction"; Mark Siderits, *Buddhism as Philosophy* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), "Chapter 1: Buddhism as Philosophy?"

Additional Resources:

Jay Garfield, *Engaging Buddhism: Why it Matters to Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

Jan Westerhoff, *The Golden Age of Indian Buddhist Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

I. FROM ABHIDHARMA "REDUCTIONISM" TO YOGĀCĀRA "IDEALISM"

Week 2: Vasubandhu (c. 4th-5th century) on the Person

Questions to consider as you read: According to the Buddhist Personalists (Pudgalavādins), what is the person? What is Vasubandhu's account of the person? Is Vasubandhu's view of the person reductionist, eliminativist, or neither?

Required Reading: Vasubandhu's *Treatise on the Negation of the Person* (*Pudgalapratīśedhaprakaraṇa*) from his auto-commentary to the *Treasury of Metaphysics* (*Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*) in Matthew Kapstein, trans., *Reasons Traces* (Somerville, Wisdom Publications, 2001), §1–6, pp. 350–367; and Vasubandhu's *Examination of the Five Aggregates* (*Pañcaskandhaka*) in Hartmut Buescher (trans.) in "Review Article: Vasubandhu's *Pañcaskandhaka*," *Indo-Iranian Journal* 53 (2010): 342–58.

Background Reading:

Jonathan Gold, "Vasubandhu," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

Noa Ronkin, "Abhidharma," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

Optional Commentary:

James Duerlinger, *Indian Buddhist Theories of Persons: Vasubandhu's 'Refutation of the Theory of Self'* (New York: Curzon/Routledge 2003).

Mark Siderits, *Buddhism as Philosophy* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), Chapters 3 and 6
Jan Westerhoff, *The Golden Age of Indian Buddhist Philosophy* (Oxford, 2018), 35–83.

Week 3: Vasubandhu on the Self

Questions to consider as you read: Why, according to his non-Buddhist interlocutors, is Vasubandhu unable to account for memory? How does Vasubandhu respond to this worry? How does Vasubandhu account for agency in the absence of a self? How does Vasubandhu account for our phenomenal experience in the absence of a self?

Required Reading: Vasubandhu's *Treatise on the Negation of the Person* (*Pudgalapratiṣedha-prakarāṇa*) from his auto-commentary to the *Treasury of Metaphysics* (*Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*) in Matthew Kapstein, trans., *Reasons Traces* (Wisdom Publications, 2001), §7, pp. 367–375.

Optional Commentary:

James Duerlinger, *Indian Buddhist Theories of Persons: Vasubandhu's 'Refutation of the Theory of Self'* (New York: Curzon/Routledge, 2003).

Mark Siderits, *Buddhism as Philosophy* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), Chapters 3 and 6.

Week 4: Vasubandhu's Attack on Material Objects

Questions to consider as you read: What kind of argument is Vasubandhu making in his *Twenty Verses* and what does he aim to prove? Is it an argument for epistemological skepticism or metaphysical skepticism about mind-independent material objects? Or neither? How does Vasubandhu combat solipsistic worries that arise in the face of his conclusion that all things are merely representations (*vijñaptimātra*)?

Required Reading: Vasubandhu's *Twenty Verses* (*Vīṃśikā*)

Optional Commentary:

Matthew Kapstein, "Mereological Considerations in Vasubandhu's 'Proof of Idealism,'" in *Reason's Traces* (Somerville: Wisdom Publications, 2001), 181–204.

Birgit Kellner and John Taber, "Studies in Yogācāra-Vijñānavāda Idealism I: The Interpretation of Vasubandhu's *Vīṃśikā*." *Asiatische Studien/Etudes Asiatiques* 68/3 (2014), 709-756.

Week 5: Dignāga (c. 480–540) on the Source and Nature of Perceptual Mental Content

Questions to consider as you read: What three possible ways in which external objects could serve as the basis of cognition, or "percept-condition." What are Dignāga's two criteria for a basis of cognition and why might these be desirable requirements? How can an internal cognitive object satisfy Dignāga's two criteria for the basis of cognition?

Required Reading: Dignāga, *Investigation of the Percept* and auto-commentary (*Ālambanaparīkṣā* and *Ālambanaparīkṣāvṛtti*), and Vinitadeva's sub-commentary (*Ālambanaparīkṣāṭīkā*) in Douglas Duckworth et al., *Dignāga's Investigation of the Percept: A Philosophical Legacy in India and Tibet* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 38–47, 78–104.

Optional Commentary:

Douglas Duckworth et al., *Dignāga's Investigation of the Percept*, 3–37.

Jan Westerhoff, *The Golden Age of Indian Buddhist Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 220–225.

II. ANTI-FOUNDATIONALISM AS THE MIDDLE WAY

Week 6: What is Emptiness? Nāgārjuna (c. 2nd century CE)

Questions to consider as you read: What does it mean to say that all things are empty of *svabhāva*? What are the two truths? How should we make sense of Nāgārjuna's tetralemma (*catuṣkoṭi*)? Does he really endorse true contradictions?

Required Reading: Nāgārjuna's *Stanzas on the Middle Way* (*Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*) trans. Mark Siderits and Shōryū Katsura, *Nāgārjuna's Middle Way: Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (Somerville, Wisdom Publications, 2013), Chapters 1, 2, 18, 24.

Background Reading:

Jan Westerhoff, "Nāgārjuna," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

Optional Commentary:

Jan Westerhoff, *Nāgārjuna's Madhyamaka* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), Chapter 2 "Interpretations of *Svabhāva*."

Jan Westerhoff, "Nāgārjuna on Emptiness: A Comprehensive Critique of Foundationalism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Indian Philosophy*, ed. Jonardon Ganeri (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 93–119.

Additional Resources:

Yasuo Deguchi, Jay L. Garfield, and Graham Priest. "The Way of the Dialetheist: Contradictions in Buddhism," *Philosophy East and West* 58, no. 3 (2008): 395–402.

Jan Westerhoff, *Nāgārjuna's Madhyamaka* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), Chapter 4 "The *Catuṣkoṭi* or Tetralemma."

Week 7: Nāgārjuna on Dependent Origination (or Non-origination?)

Questions to consider as you read: How are we to reconcile Nāgārjuna's affirmation of dependent origination with his argument against origination from self, other, both, or neither? In the final analysis, does Nāgārjuna endorse dependent origination or non-origination?

Required Reading: Nāgārjuna's *Stanzas on the Middle Way* (*Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*), trans. Mark Siderits and Shōryū Katsura, *Nāgārjuna's Middle Way: Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (Somerville: Wisdom Publications, 2013), Chapter 1 again.

William L. Ames, "Buddhapālita's Exposition of the Madhyamaka," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 14, no. 4: 313–48.

William L. Ames, "Bhāvaviveka's *Prajñāpradīpa*: A Translation of Chapter 1 (Part I)," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 21 (1993): 209–59.

Optional commentary:

Anne MacDonald, *In Clear Words. The Prasannapadā, Chapter One*, vol. 2. (Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences, 2015), §§17–70, pp. 44–152.

Jan Westerhoff, *Nāgārjuna's Madhyamaka* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), Chapter 5 "Causation."

Mid-Term Paper Due

Week 8: Is Nāgārjuna an Epistemological Skeptic?

Questions to consider as you read: Does Nāgārjuna really reject the intelligibility of all sources of knowledge or does he simply reject epistemological foundationalism? Would

Nāgārjuna endorse epistemological coherentism, fallibilism, or pragmatism? What does Nāgārjuna mean when he claims not to have a thesis?

Required Reading: Nāgārjuna's *Dispeller of Disputes* (*Vigrahavyāvartanī*), trans. Jan Westerhoff, *Dispeller of Disputes: Nāgārjuna's Vigrahavyāvartanī* (Oxford University Press, 2010), 19–42.

The Nyāya-sūtra: Selections with Early Commentaries, trans. Matthew Dasti and Stephen Phillips (Hackett, 2017), 14–17.

Optional Commentary:

Jonardon Ganeri, *Philosophy in Classical India* (Routledge, 2001), Chapter 2 “Rationality, Emptiness, and the Objective View.”

Stephen Phillips, *Epistemology in Classical India: The Knowledge Sources of the Nyāya School* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 17–32.

Jan Westerhoff, *Dispeller of Disputes*, 43–129.

Week 9: Is Śāntarakṣita's (c. 725–788) Neither-one-nor-many Argument a "Master Argument" for Emptiness?

Questions to consider as you read: How does Śāntarakṣita's neither-one-nor-many argument turn on the rejection of unity? How does Śāntarakṣita's strategy in his argument for the emptiness of mental entities differ from that of his argument targeting material entities? How are we to make sense of Śāntarakṣita's apparent endorsement of Yogācāra idealism on a conventional level?

Required Reading: Śāntarakṣita's *Ornament of the Middle Way* (*Madhyamakālaṃkāra*), trans. Masamichi Ichigō, “Śāntarakṣita's *Madhyamakālaṃkāra*,” in *Studies in the Literature of the Great Vehicle: Three Mahāyāna Buddhist Texts*, eds. Luis O. Gómez and Jonathan A. Silk. (University of Michigan, 1989), 141–240.

Optional Commentary:

James Blumenthal, *The Ornament of the Middle Way: A Study of the Madhyamaka Thought of Śāntarakṣita: Including Translations of Śāntarakṣita's Madhyamakālaṃkāra (The Ornament of the Middle Way) and Gyel-tsab's Dbu ma rgyan gyi brjed byang (Remembering “The Ornament of the Middle Way”)* (Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 2004).

Thomas Doctor, *Speech of Delight: Mipham's Commentary on Śāntarakṣita's Ornament of the Middle Way* (Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 2004).

Week 10: Śāntideva (c. 700-750) on Buddhist Ethics: No Self, No Freedom?

Questions to consider as you read: How does Śāntideva use the boundary between self and others to motivate ethical conduct? How does Śāntideva recruit our own self-interest to work in the interest of others? How are we to reconcile Śāntideva's claim that (i) others are blameless for their anger because it is causally determined with his claim that (ii) we are blameworthy for our own anger?

Required Reading: Śāntideva's *Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* (*Bodhicaryāvatāra*) Chapter 6, especially verses 22–32, and Chapter 8, especially verses 90–103

Optional Commentary:

Jay Garfield, *Engaging Buddhism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), Chapter 9.

Charles Goodman, "Consequentialism, Agent-Neutrality, and Mahāyāna Ethic,"

Philosophy East and West 58, no. 1 (2008): 17–35.

Mark Siderits, "Paleo-Compatibilism and Buddhist Reductionism." *Sophia* 47 (2208): 29–42.

Paul Williams, *Altruism and Reality* (Curzon Press, 1998), Chapter 5.

Additional Resources:

Jay Garfield, "Just Another Word for Nothing Left to Lose," in Dasti and Bryant eds., *Free Will, Agency, and Selfhood in Indian Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

I. EPISTEMOLOGICAL ISSUES FOR BUDDHIST "NOMINALISTS"

Week 11: Dharmakīrti (c. 600–660) on the Causal Inference

Questions to consider as you read: According to Dharmakīrti, how is a sequence of observations and non-observations supposed to give us knowledge of causal relations? How can Dharmakīrti be a nominalist about relations and yet also endorse a theory of natural relations (svabhāvapratibandha) that underwrite our causal inferences? How does the causal inference map onto a syllogism, according to Dharmakīrti?

Required Reading: Dharmakīrti's *Examination of Relations* (*Sambandhaparīkṣā*) and selections from Dharmakīrti's *Commentary on the Sources of Knowledge* (*Pramāṇavārttika*), Chapter 1, and auto-commentary and (*Pramāṇavārttikasvavṛtti*) in Richard Hayes and Brendan Gillon, "Introduction to Dharmakīrti's Theory of inference as presented in *Pramāṇavārttika Svopajñavṛtti* 1–10," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 19 (1991): 1–73, and Brendan Gillon and Richard Hayes, "Dharmakīrti on the role of causation in inference as presented in *Pramāṇavārttika Svopajñavṛtti* 11–38," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 36 (2008): 335–404.

Background Reading:

Vincent Eltschinger, "Dharmakīrti," *Review International de Philosophie* 64/3 [253] (2010): 397–440.

Tom Tillemans, "Dharmakīrti," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

Recommended Commentary:

Brendan Gillon, "The Role of Causation in Dharmakīrti's Theory of Inference: The *Pramāṇavārttika*," in *Buddhist Philosophy: Essential Readings*, eds. William Edelglass and Jay Garfield (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 197–204.

Additional Resources:

John Dunne, *Foundations of Dharmakīrti's Philosophy*, (Somerville: Wisdom Publications, 2004), Chapter 3.

Brendan Gillon, "Dharmakīrti and the Problem of Induction" in *Studies in the Buddhist Epistemological Tradition*, edited by Ernst Steinkellner (Vienna 1991).

Week 12: Dharmakīrti on the Sources of Knowledge and their Objects

Questions to consider as you read: What are the two sources of knowledge and their objects according to Dignāga and Dharmakīrti? How is causal efficacy used to distinguish between particulars and "universals"? If universals are unreal, how does Dharmakīrti account for the fact that they are objects of a reliable source of knowledge?

Required Reading: Selections from Chapter 3 of Dharmakīrti's *Commentary on the Sources of Knowledge*, in Eli Franco and Miyako Notake, *Dharmakīrti on the Duality of the Object*, (LIT, 2015).

Recommended Commentary:

Eli Franco and Miyako Notake, *Dharmakīrti on the Duality of the Object*, 1–23.

Additional Resources:

George Dreyfus, “Can the Fool Lead the Blind: Perception and the Given in Dharmakīrti’s Thought,” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 24, no. 3 (1996): 209–229

Week 13: Dharmakīrti on the Theory of Exclusion (*apoha*)

Questions to consider as you read: How is the theory of exclusion meant to solve the problem of universals? Does the theory of exclusion really claim that the meanings of words are all negations? If so, then how does it account for the fact that we take the meanings of words like "mongoose" and "maroon" to be positive?

Required Reading: Selections from Chapter 1 of Dharmakīrti’s *Commentary on the Sources of Knowledge* and auto-commentary, trans. Vincent Eltschinger, John Taber, Michael Torsten Much, Isabelle Ratié, *Dharmakīrti’s Theory of Exclusion (apoha), Part I. On Concealing. An Annotated Translation of Pramāṇavārttikasvavrtti* 24,16–45,20 (*Pramāṇavārttika* 1.40–91) (Tokyo: International Institute for Buddhist Studies, 2018), 27–106.

Background Reading:

Arindam Chakrabarti and Mark Siderits, “Introduction,” in *Apoha: Buddhist Nominalism and Human Cognition*, eds. Mark Siderits, Tom Tillemans, and Arindam Chakrabarti (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

Optional Commentary:

Tom Tillemans, "How to Talk About Ineffable Things: Dignāga and Dharmakīrti on Apoha," in *Apoha: Buddhist Nominalism and Human Cognition*, 50–63.

John Dunne, "Key Features of Dharmakīrti's Apoha Theory," in *Apoha: Buddhist Nominalism and Human Cognition*, 84–108.

Pascale Hugon, "Dharmakīrti's Discussion of Circularity," in *Apoha: Buddhist Nominalism and Human Cognition*, 109–124.

Week 14: Ratnakīrti (c. 1000-1050) on the Problem of Other Minds

Questions to consider as you read: Why does Ratnakīrti argue that the inference from the existence of one's own mind to the existence of other minds is not justified? What exactly is Ratnakīrti's conclusion and how should we make sense of his invocation of the two truths? Is he arguing for epistemological or metaphysical skepticism about the existence of other minds?

Required Reading: *Refutation of Other Minds (Santānāntaradūṣaṇa)*, trans. Jonardon Ganeri, *The Self: Naturalism, Consciousness, and the First-Person Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 203–212.

Optional Commentary:

Jonardon Ganeri, *The Self: Naturalism, Consciousness, and the First-Person Perspective*, Chapter 11.

Masahiro Inami, “The Problem of Other Minds in the Buddhist Epistemological Tradition,” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 29, no. 4 (2011), 465–483.

Roy Perrett, “Buddhist Idealism and the Problem of Other Minds,” *Asian Philosophy* 27, no. 1 (2017): 59–68.

Final Paper Due